

# Melville Church

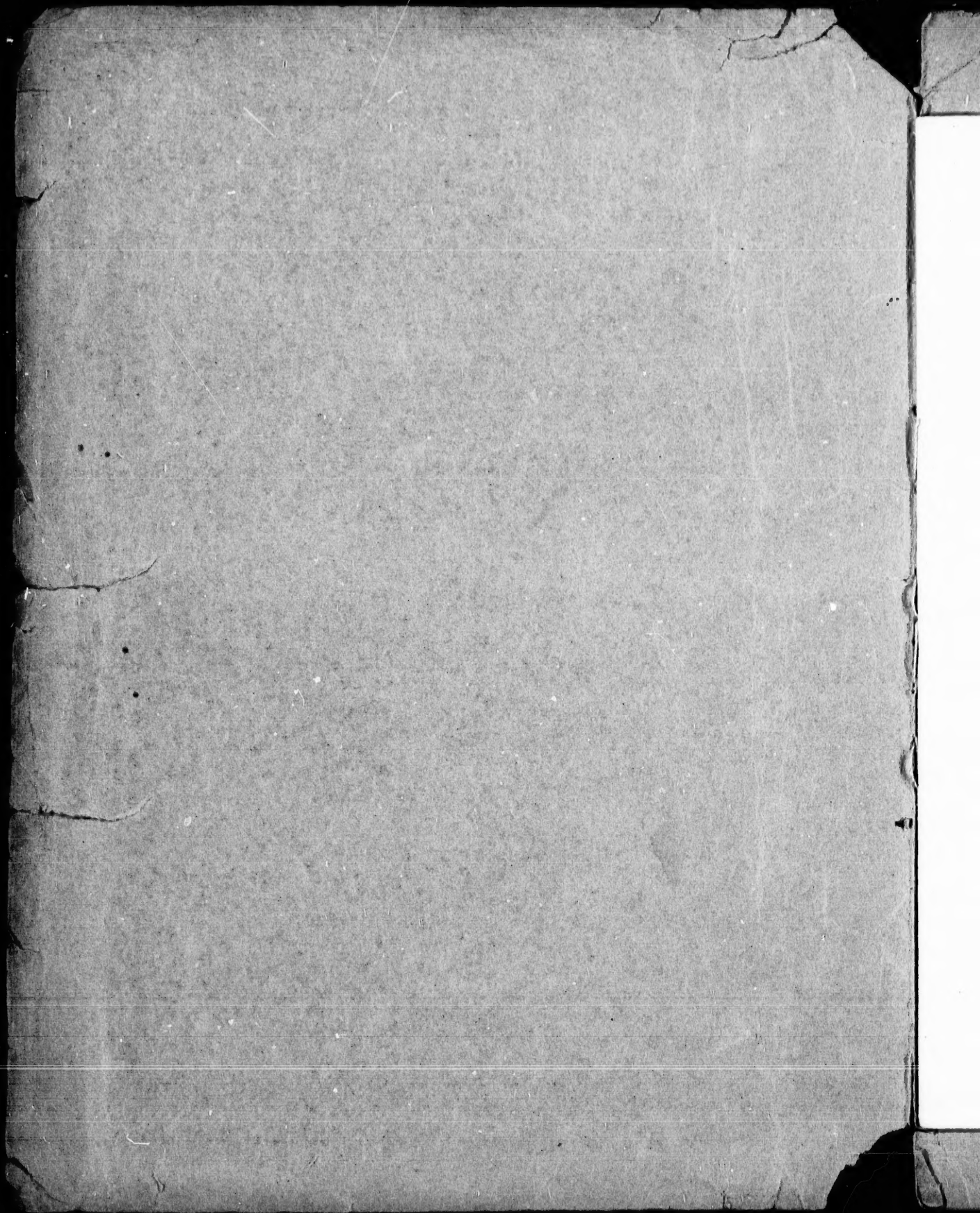
## Fergus



*Opened 13 May 1900*



*Pamph  
1900  
No. 114*



MELVILLE CHURCH  
F E R G U S

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Pamph  
1900  
no. 14

### Its Early History

**I**N the early times the congregation of Melville Church worshipped with that of St. Andrew's, in the quaint old rough-cast building which was superseded by the present handsome structure.

In 1835 when the first St. Andrew's Church was completed, there were not more than five or six houses in Fergus. The first minister was the Rev. Alex. Gardiner, and the members of the Kirk Session were A. D. Fordyce, Francis Anderson, Charles Allan, John Munroe and George Skene. The districts to which they were appointed were large ; for the parish practically extended to Georgian Bay. In 1840 it was found necessary to elect the following five elders : James Webster, John McKee, John Wilkie, William Gerrie and Thomas Dow.

In 1841 Mr. Gardiner died, and for two years the people were kept together by the reading of printed sermons by Mr. Fordyce.

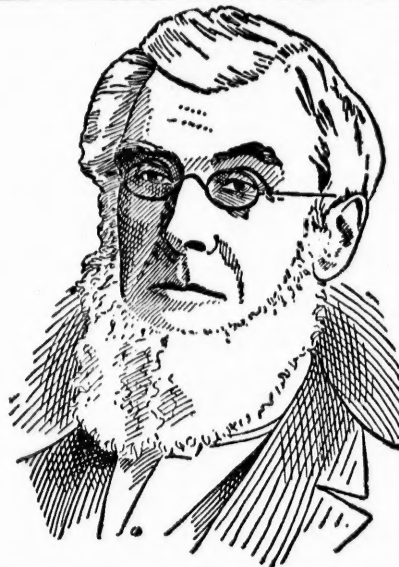
In 1843 the Rev. George Smellie and his wife arrived, and on December 13th he was inducted to his charge. Mr. Smellie came from Orkney, where he had preached for eight years in Lady Parish.

In 1844 occurred the movement in Canada which followed the Disruption of 1843, in Scotland. Mr. Smellie's convictions led him to throw in his lot with the Disruption party, and in this he was supported by 360 of the 449 members of the congregation, among whom were six Trustees. But, headed by Mr. Fordyce, the remaining Trustees protested strongly against any severance with the Church of Scotland, and demanded the surrender of both the church and manse. "At last," as the old records put it, "after a series of annoyances, threatening a prosecution at law against the minister unless he should, in his own name and that of those who adhered to him, resign all rights to said property, the congregation, without being convinced of the justice or legality of such procedure, deemed it expedient, for the sake of peace, to abandon St. Andrew's church under protest, and proceed with the erection of another place of worship for themselves, which they are to designate Melville Church."



## Building The First Church

This was towards the end of 1845, and steps were taken toward the erection of a church. Negotiations were at once entered into for a more peaceful possession of the old building. Shortly after it is noted that "the church doors have been opened for the service of the congregation from Sabbath to Sabbath with intimation that it is to be continued for six months certain, and timeous notice thereafter given to quit." But, notwithstanding



THE LATE REV. GEORGE SMELLIE, D. D., The First Pastor  
this, there are tales told which go to show that the concession was not very peaceably allowed.

The offer of the Hon. Adam Fergusson of sites for both church and manse was gladly accepted, and the property was cleared by fire. In 1846 building operations were begun, Wm. Sanday and John Bayne being contractors for the masonry and Andrew Burns and David Munroe for the carpentering.

On Mrs. Smellie's birthday the foundation of the manse was laid, the corner stone of the church being laid, without public ceremony, on the third anniversary of her wedding day by James William Smellie, a child two years of age.

In the year 1847 the building was completed, and on Thursday morning, March 4th, was formally opened by Rev. Dr. Burns, of Knox College. The first Sunday service, conducted by the pastor, assisted by Rev. Dr. Bayne, of Galt, lasted from eleven o'clock in the morning to five o'clock in the afternoon.

Including the wings, which were added at a later date, from \$5000 to \$6000 was expended on the building. Of the 230 subscribers to the Building Fund, six are still connected with the congregation. So far as known, the following are those who were subscribers to the Fund and still survive : David Black, of Fergus, Alexander Barnett, Wm. Dow, George Jamieson, Alex. McInnes, Alex. Macdonald, Hercules Morice, James Moir, Andrew Richardson.

### Some Incidents In Its History

The Melville congregation formed the nucleus from which many of the Presbyterian congregations in this section of the country sprung to life. In 1853 nearly 60 of the congregation carried away their certificates of membership to Elora and became the nucleus of Chalmer's church. Shortly afterwards other members formed a congregation at Belwood, which is now known as St. John's church. Again towards the end of 1864 a number of the members found it more convenient to have a place of worship at Cumnock.

About the time St. John's church, Belwood, was established, it became the practice to hold two services on Sunday. Owing to the long journeyings which had devolved upon the pastor it had hitherto been the custom to hold but one, but the thinning of the congregation made it both practicable and desirable that two should be held. In the beginning, the afternoon service was held at four o'clock, but later it was changed to half-past six, and at a still more recent date was changed to seven o'clock.

To the congregation the heating has ever been a troublesome question, and it was certainly not less so in the early days of the church's history. For some reason the contractors left the chimney unfinished ; why, is not clearly understood. This caused much

annoyance and the Deacon's Court, year after year, sent them notice that unless they completed the job it would be completed at their expense. At last the Court directed that a collection be taken up and the job completed.

The collapse of the stove pipes during services was also a not unfrequent diversion which caused the Deacons some annoyance.

The explanation of the real purpose of the large openings in the wall on either side of the pulpit is found in this resolution, made by the Deacon's Court, one particularly cold winter : "Resolved, that the porches be made proof against fire by lining the partitions near the stoves with tin, and taking off the lath from the part of the wall adjoining ; also that an opening be made above each stove to admit the heated air into the church."

In 1861 the congregation found it necessary to enlarge the church, and the wings were therefore added.

### The Ministers

In 1885 the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon the pastor. This fitting recognition of his long and faithful services was followed by another several years later, when a special Jubilee demonstration was held under the auspices of the Presbytery of Guelph. For a short time before his withdrawal from active work, Dr. Smellie was assisted by Mr. J. C. Tolmie, then a student in Knox College. Then in 1888, after 52 years of active labor in the ministry, he resigned, and, in July, 1889, was succeeded by the Rev. R. M. Craig.

Rev. Robert McKellar Craig is a graduate of Knox College. By a faithful ministration of the word, by a fearless denunciation of wrong, by a keen interest manifested in every department of congregational work and by a fellow feeling which enabled him to enter into the trials and sorrows of the family and the individual he soon became greatly endeared to his congregation, the children and young people being particularly attached to him. As a citizen he took an active interest in education and every scheme that had for its object the betterment of mankind, the spread of morality, the advancement of truth and righteousness in the community. Mrs. Craig by a loving sympathy and active co-operation in the work of the congregation was a power for good and it is little





REV. R. M. CRAIG, Pastor From 1889 to 1895



wonder the congregation and community regretted deeply the fact that because of failing health Mr. Craig was forced to go south, where, it is a pleasure to know, that as Synodial Missionary of New Mexico and Arozona he has a larger sphere of usefulness, a work in which his wonderful energy and excellent executive ability find scope for fullest exercise.

Mr. Craig's ministry terminated in 1895. He was succeeded by the present pastor, Rev. John H. MacVicar, B. A., son of Rev. Principal MacVicar, D. D., LL. D., Montreal.

On November, 14th, 1896, the first pastor of Melville church passed away. At the time of his death, Dr. Smellie was in Toronto, but his remains were brought to Fergus and interred with all honor. Mrs. Smellie still survives her husband and resides in the old Melville Manse, Fergus.

As a token of their esteem, the congregation erected a memorial tablet of white marble in the church to the late Dr. Smellie, on which is the following inscription: "Sacred to the memory of Rev. George Smellie, D. D., first pastor of Melville Church, Fergus. Born in Orkney, June 14, 1811. Died in Toronto, November 14, 1896. He preached eight years in Lady parish, Orkney, and came to Fergus in 1843, labouring here with true devotion for 44 years. In 1888 he retired after an active ministry of 52 years. 'Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.' "

## The Elders

The following is a list of elders added to the Session since the separation with St. Andrew's: In August, 1844, there were added A. D. Ferrier, W. Gibbon, Thomas Dow, W. Kilpatrick, and John Wilkie. In February, 1853, John Martin, James Gerrie, James Ross, W. Clark, James Beattie. In October, 1861, George Wilson, Alexander Taylor, Adam Argo. In December, 1865, Forbes Moir, Peter Dow, James Dow, James Davidson, Samuel Dobbin, John Rutherford. In October, 1872, A. D. Ferrier after an absence from Canada, returned to the Session. In February, 1877, Robert Phillips, William Castell, Peter Rennie, Hugh Black, John Richardson. In September, 1878, A. D. Ferrier, after another absence from the country returned to the Session, along with Adam Argo. In February, 1888, George Tower Fergusson. In

September, 1890, James Macdonald, David Nairn, Robert Morice, F. B. Anderson, Wm. Ross, Dr. J. P. Roger.

### **Building The New Melville Church**

But the church which had sheltered the people of the congregation for so long was becoming inadequate, and for some years the advisability of building a new church has been under consideration.

In November 1898, the following gentlemen were appointed to attend to the arrangements for building a new church: Hugh Black, convener; R. M. Glen, secretary; Peter Dow, John Macdonald, Geo. Petrie, F. B. Anderson, John Richardson, William Barnett, J. J. Sanderson, W. H. Gordon, A. Mills, A. A. Armstrong, James Russell, jr., Major J. J. Craig, R. Phillips, jr., W. H. Johnson, M. D., Charles Kay, James R. Caldwell and J. P. Roger, M. D. A Sub-Committee, consisting of the following gentlemen, was appointed to personally superintend the building operations: Hugh Black, Alex. Mills, Dr. Roger, James Russell, A. A. Armstrong, R. M. Glen, secretary.

From among several sites the one on the south-west corner of St. Andrew and Tower Streets was chosen as the most desirable.

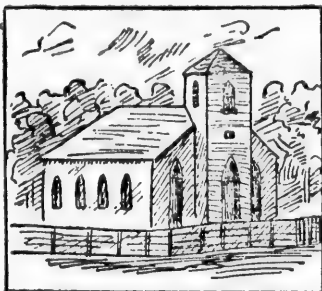
Very fittingly, Mrs. Smellie was chosen to lay the corner stone of the new church. This ceremony took place at five o'clock on Thursday, June 8, 1899, in the presence of a large number of the citizens and visitors from other places. The sterling silver trowel with which Mrs. Smellie laid the corner stone was presented to her by the church, and bears this inscription: "Presented to Mrs. Smellie on the occasion of laying the corner stone of Melville church, Fergus, June 8, 1899."

### **The Opening Ceremonies**

The formal opening of the new Melville Church for public worship took place on Sunday, May 13th, 1900. As the weather was beautiful and very few services were held in the churches for many miles around, the attendance consequently was all that was expected.

In the morning the attendance was so large that it was found necessary to hold an overflow service in the Town Hall.

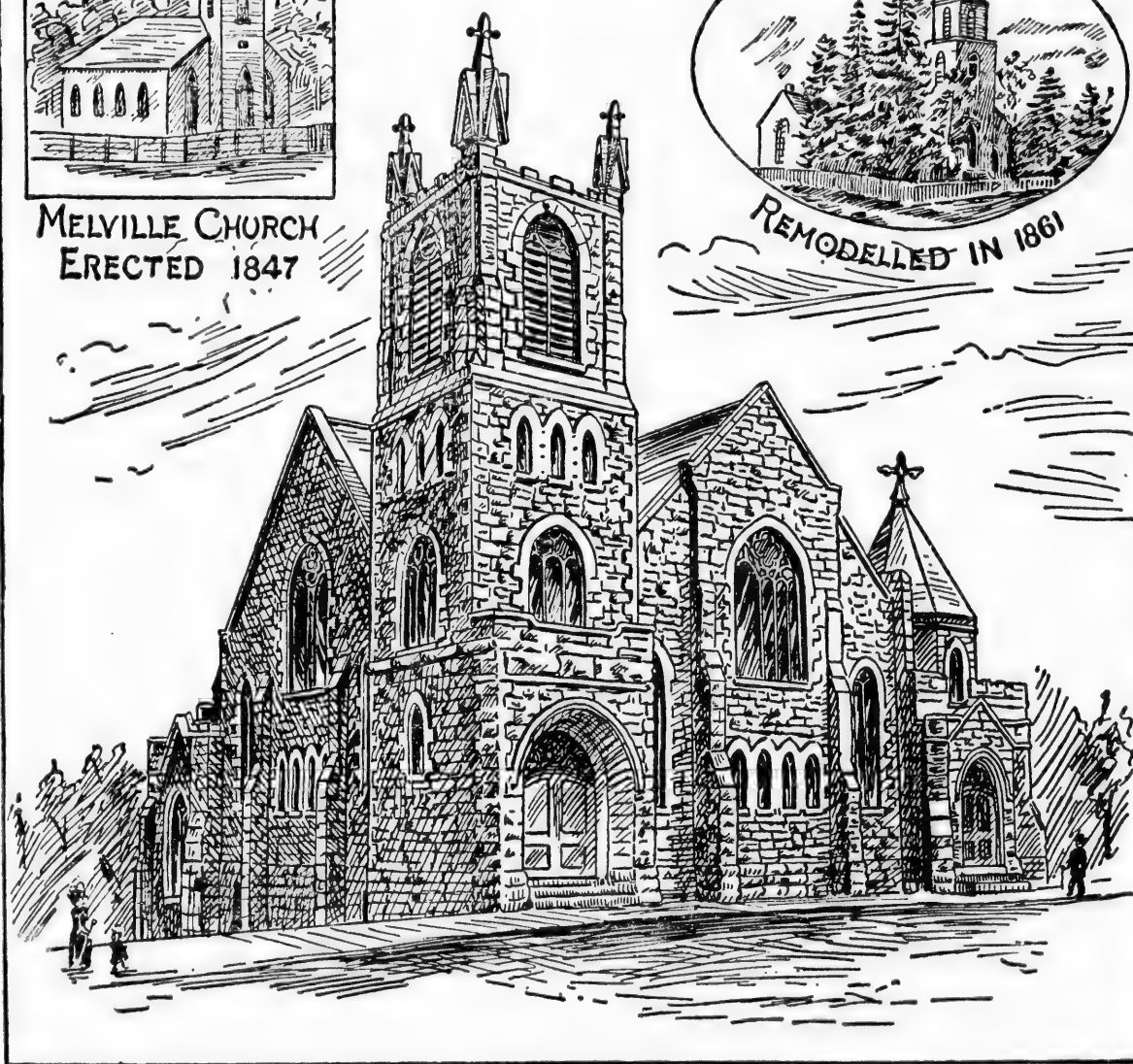
The services in the church were conducted by the pastor; the



MELVILLE CHURCH  
ERECTED 1847



REMODELLED IN 1861



FROM PHOTO BY W. S. McKOWAN

THE NEW MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS



Dedicatory Prayer being made by Rev. J. B. Mullan, of St. Andrew's church, while the sermon was preached by the Rev. Principal MacVicar, D. D., LL. D., of the Presbyterian College, Montreal.

Principal MacVicar's texts are found in Jonah 2 : 9, and Philippians 2 : 12-13.

He finished a particularly fine sermon in the following words : "I add only a few words on what has occupied the thoughts and called forth the energetic efforts of many of you during the past year—the erection and dedication of your church edifice. You have done well to have put your hands to this work and to-day you rejoice in the possession of a substantial church, a beautiful, commodious, substantial structure, fit to last for centuries, taking rank among the best in this entire Province, and in all respects admirably adapted to its sacred purposes. It does honor to your intelligence, your faith in God, your courage and liberality. I trust you enter it free from all financial encumbrances that would hinder the spiritual blessing and growth to be looked for within these walls. For we must not forget the command and promise of God in these words : 'Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.' What a glorious prospect, if you comply with the conditions stipulated. And do not forget God's mercies to you in the past. His hand hath been upon you for good, and therefore you have prospered—"Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." In this day of gladness you bring with you into this new sanctuary all the hallowed memories of the last half century. You recall with grateful hearts the years of the right hand of the Most High. How sacred and touching the recollections that come up at this hour of those of you who can look back over fifty years in which you worshipped God in the former house along with near and dear ones who have been called to their eternal home. What precious lessons of instruction and consolation and hope and love flowed from the lips of those who were set over you in the Lord ; and, may I not say pre-eminently from the lips of him who was first Pastor of this congregation, the late Dr. Smellie, who devoted

newly the whole of his long, faithful and fruitful ministerial life to the service of God among you. While therefore you gratefully recall the sacred memories of the past let me remind you that your entrance into this house means new and larger opportunities and responsibilities. You have now, what was long urgently needed, rooms suitable for prayer meetings and christian fellowship, for the cultivation of the social and spiritual life of the flock. These rooms are in keeping, I am glad to see, with the supreme importance of work among the young whose spiritual training deserves our best efforts, and in keeping with the ever increasing enterprises, missionary and benevolent, that are being successfully prosecuted by devoted Christian women. I know something of their noble services here and in all parts of our great Dominion, how much our church and country owe them in missionary and educational work, secular and religious ; and my prayer to God is that He would increase their power for good one hundred fold. Finally, let songs of gratitude rise from your hearts for that God has enabled you to make this worthy offering for the glory of His great name and for your own eternal good. The gift is not too large or costly to be made to the God whom you adore and who redeemed you by the blood of his only begotten Son. And you are not the poorer but the richer for having made it. See to it then that with united purpose, all of you, aged and young, men and women, office bearers and members, continue to trust in God and go forward. Is not this the word of the Lord to you at this hour—Be strong all ye people of this flock, and work, for I am with you, and my spirit remaineth among you ; fear not ? Then let this house be the centre and scene of spiritual activity greater than in the past—a place of vigorous, fearless, faithful exposition of God's truth, a place of consolation and help to the perplexed and afflicted—a place of guidance and edification to believers, and of conviction and awakening to the halting and indifferent, a spiritual birthplace of souls, the very gate of heaven to you and to your children and children's children. To this end cleave to the truth of our text, that salvation is of the Lord ; and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

In the Town Hall the services were conducted by the Rev. Robert Johnston, D. D., of St. Andrew's church, London, Ont.

He, preached an excellent sermon from Joshua 1 : 1-2. This was the only overflow service held.

In the afternoon at 3 o'clock another service was held in the church, when the Rev. J. S. Ross, D. D., of Dublin street Methodist church, Guelph, preached to a large congregation. His text was taken from Philippians 1 : 21. The scriptures were read by the Rev. M. Swann, and the opening prayer offered by the Rev. C. E. Bolton, Congregational church, Fergus.

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REV. JOHN H. MACVICAR, B. A., The Present Pastor

For the evening service the church was crowded to the doors. The sermon was preached by the Rev. Dr. Johnston, of London, from Psalm 32, and 51 : 7, while the invocation was made by the Rev. M. C. MacLennan, of Alma ; the scripture reading by the Rev. R. A. Robinson, St. James' church, Fergus, and the Thanksgiving Prayer by Rev. W. H. Harvey, B. A., Methodist church, Fergus.

The musical part of the proceedings was good. The anthems by the choir, under the leadership of Mr. A. A. Armstrong, and Mrs. Gordon, organist, and the solos by Miss Murray, of Toronto, and Mr. Albert Armstrong, of Boston, were much enjoyed.

The Pastor very cordially acknowledged the courtesy of other churches in Fergus and the neighborhood in dismissing their services during the day. The marked spirit of christian unity that prevailed was very gratifying.

On Monday a Social was held in the church. Refreshments were served in the dining hall from five to eight o'clock by the ladies of the congregation. At eight o'clock a programme was commenced in the church before a large audience, with the pastor, Rev. John H. MacVicar, in the chair. Addresses were given by the chairman, Rev. Mr. Swann, Rev. Dr. Torrance, Rev. Mr. Mullan, Rev. Mr. Harvey, Rev. Dr. MacVicar, Rev. Dr. Ross, Rev. Dr. Johnston, Rev. Mr. Robinson, Rev. Mr. Bolton, Rev. Mr. Mann, Rev. R. W. Ross (Knox Church, Guelph), Rev. Mr. Horne, Rev. Mr. McIntosh, Rev. Mr. Mackenzie and Rev. Robert S. Ross (Pennsylvania). The music interspersed through the programme consisted of solos by Miss Cormie (Guelph), Mr. Albert Armstrong, Rev. Dr. Ross and Mr. James Macdonnell, besides anthems by the choir. Mr. Hugh Black, convener of the Building Committee, read a very satisfactory statement regarding the building of the church. The chairman read letters and telegrams of regret from the following gentlemen: George Tower Fergusson, Toronto; J. J. Patterson, Flint, Michigan; Rev. R. M. Craig, Albuquerque, New Mexico; James McMullen, M. P., Ottawa, and Rev. Mr. Glassford, Guelph.

It was announced that over \$2,400 in cash was contributed at the Sabbath services. The proceeds of the Social and additional donations are likely to make the total cash \$2,500. Promises for new subscriptions were put in for another \$2,000. The original subscriptions amounted to \$8,000, making the total now in sight for the Building Fund at least \$12,500. The treasurer's statement showed that the structure, when all extras are known, will have cost about \$17,000. For the furnishings the Woman's Aid Society have in hand upwards of \$1,200, but it is not yet known how much of this will be expended.

### Description Of The New Church

The New Melville Church is situated on the south-west corner of St. Andrew and Tower Streets. St. Andrew, the principal thoroughfare of Fergus, has a very imposing appearance;

much more so than streets usually have in towns the size of Fergus. Tower Street crosses St. Andrew just west of the business centre. From this it will be seen that the church is in a most central position, convenient to the village and country adherents alike. The structure is built of brown stone, with white stone facings, and in appearance will compare favorably with the most modern in Canada.

The church faces St. Andrew Street. It has two entrances on this street, the principal one being the Tower Street or east corner of the church. This entrance is a beautiful, arched, double door, and on this corner is a tower running up to a good height (the Building Committee is considering the advisability of building it six feet higher) with four splendid-looking, painted and sanded, metal finials. The other entrance on St. Andrew Street is on the west corner and is not quite as large as its sister entrance to the east, the door being the same shape but with a different tower or, more properly speaking, roof above it. From both these entrances a stairway leads to the gallery in the auditorium.

On the west side there is about 15 feet vacant between the church and the Town Hall property. A walk will be placed here, running down to an entrance just back of the auditorium portion of the building. This entrance leads to the school rooms, class rooms, auditorium, gallery and basement. Just opposite to this door on Tower Street is a like entrance.

In the main entrance is the tablet erected in memory of the late Dr. Smellie, having been transferred from the old church.

While the exterior of the New Melville Church is certainly handsome, substantial and a credit to the Melvillites and to Fergus, the interior is one of the nicest one could have the privilege of seeing. While no one would say it has an elaborate or even very costly appearance, all agree that it is both handsome and comfortable-looking. The floor, the aisles of which are covered with Brussels carpet, slopes gradually down to the pulpit. The seating capacity is 650, with certainly a thousand by using chairs. The seats are placed in such position that all are facing the pulpit.

The pulpit, Communion table, chairs and a beautiful morroco Bible are the donation of Dr. Smellie, of Port Arthur, son of the late Rev. Dr. Smellie. The pulpit and chairs are made from



quarter-cut oak, beautifully hand carved and upholstered in Russia leather. Under the pulpit is a large half-circle platform for Communion purposes. On this platform is a smaller one, on which the pulpit is placed.

Raised about three feet, and immediately behind the pulpit, are the choir's quarters, with a handsome iron railing in front. Placed at the back of the choir's platform is a fine Bell, double manual, pedal organ.

Circling around on the front, east and west sides of the auditorium, is the gallery, so sloped that occupants in the back pews can see the pulpit just as well as those sitting in any part of the church. The gallery also has an iron railing around it. These iron railings are all finished in bronze; the rest of the interior in oak.

In the gallery are three large, beautiful stained glass window groups, one on the east side, one the west and one on the north. The one on the north contains two memorial windows. One is "In memory of James McQueen, born Jan. 28th, 1810; died Feb. 14, 1899. Christina Black, his wife, born January 18th, 1810; died May 2nd, 1894. 'Lo, I stand at the door and knock.'" This window was donated by the McQueen family, who are so well and favorably known in and around Fergus. The other is "In memory of a devoted Elder, Alexander David Ferrier, born November 13, 1813; died August 3, 1890. 'The winds and the sea obey him.'" This one was donated by Miss Drydesdale, Dr. Smellie, of Port Arthur, and other kind friends of the church and the deceased Elder.

The window on the north side is "In memory of James Cattenach, who died August 30th, 1881. 'I am the good Shepherd.'" This is the kind donation of Mrs. Cattenach and her daughter, Mrs. McGregor, of Brantford.

In all there are 16 beautiful stained glass windows in the auditorium.

On each side of the pulpit and choir gallery are two doors, one upstairs and one down stairs, making in all eight entrances to the interior of the building, and four from the exterior—certainly a great convenience in case of fire or panic, for which purpose, however, it is to be hoped, they will never be required.

From the doors at the back of the auditorium you enter a

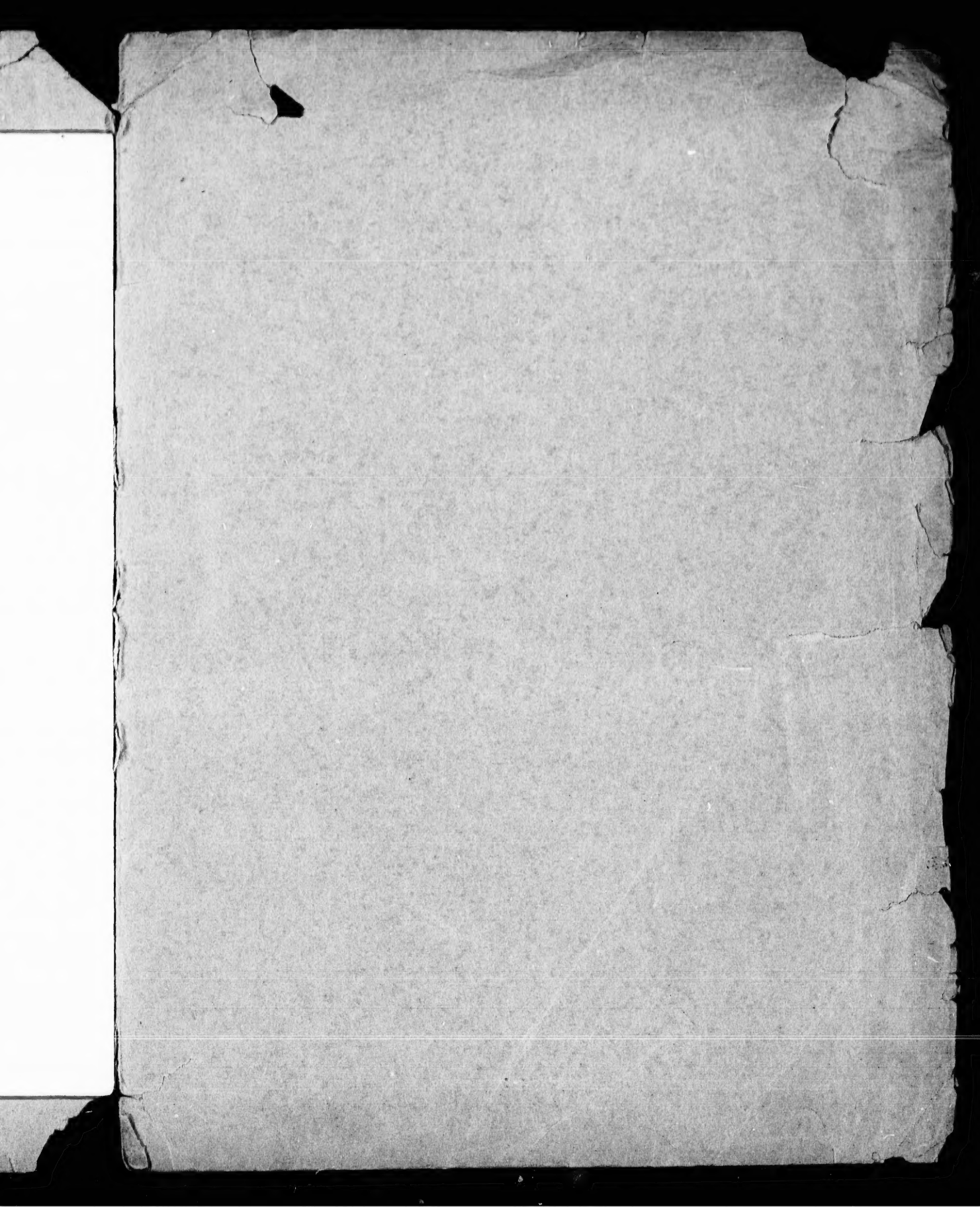
hall which runs across the building. Across the hall from the large or church auditorium is another for the Sabbath School, which, of course, is much smaller and less pretentious in appearance ; but, still, it is of a good size and fine appearance. It is built in a half circle, with class rooms above and below, so situated that the superintendent can see every class and every scholar can see him. There are also other rooms in this part of the building for various purposes customary in modern churches. All of this portion of the church also has stained glass windows.

The heating is by hot air from three large furnaces, and although there has been no severe weather since the furnaces have been in operation, there is not a doubt but the system will do the work expected.

The basement is the full size of the church. The back half or that portion under the Sabbath School auditorium and halls is floored with cement and the walls plastered. The front half, or probably less, is not floored, being used as a store room. The back portion is divided off into suitable apartments, which are roomy and lofty.

The lighting of the whole building is, of course, by electricity, the total number of lamps being one hundred and fifty-eight, all put in according to the latest ideas in lighting. After the wires enter the building they connect with the meter, where the current used is measured ; then they pass to two beautiful marble switchboards, where, by a system of switches, the lighting is completely controlled. Every ten lamps have a separate switch so that any section of the building can be lighted instantly as required. When all the lights are turned on the effect is superb ; so much so, indeed, that it is doubtful if a more beautiful interior is to be found in Canada.

Besides the special donations referred to previously, many members have contributed to the building of the church most liberally. To give a list would require more space than is available. The Ladies' Aid, however, deserve special mention for the untiring interest they have taken in the edifice. Through their zeal they have been able to contribute the whole of the lighting, the carpets and matting, besides other items of the furnishings. It must be a source of great pleasure to the ladies to know that their efforts on the interior have placed the New Melville Church, Fergus, among the most beautiful and comfortable in the country.



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